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ABSTRACT

A new approach to the teaching of European history is being implemented in Advanced Placement secondary classes. In the latter 1950's a Committee of Examiners composed of European history professors and secondary teachers formulated a course description comprised of a brief outline of an introductory survey in European history. It was organized chronologically with major emphasis on the period from the Renaissance to the Second World War. The structure of this course remained fundamentally unchanged for approximately fifteen years. In 1971 the Committee of Examiners re-evaluated the goals and methods of the program, and agreed to alter the content and structure of the course to reflect the educational changes of the 1960's. Several basic changes are: 1) the emphasis of the course has shifted to the more recent modern period -- from the 1650's to the present; 2) stress is placed on cross-cultural comparisons of European history to other cultures; 3) structure focuses on broad thematic lines rather than on the chronological. Most significantly, the course will be constantly evolving as new themes are added. (SJM)

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ADVANCED PLACEMENT EUROPEAN HISTORY: A NEW APPROACH

The Advanced Placement European History course was launched in 1956 as part of a wider program to provide bright, motivated secondary school students with an opportunity to do intorductory college work during their junior and senior years. A Committee of Examiners, composed of college European history professors and secondary school teachers formulated a "course description", a brief outline of an introductory survey in European history, to serve as a guide for the teachers. After much deliberation, they developed a course that closely paralled the then widely-taught introductory European history course. To measure performance in this course they developed a three-hour final examination, partially objective, but primarily composed of essay questions. It was decided that the essay examinations would be collectively read and evaluated by teams of college and secondary school teachers.

The program has enjoyed amazing success, growing from fifty-nine participants the first, to over three thousand in 1972.[1] Not only has the program allowed thousands of bright students to demonstrate their competence and immediately enter advanced college history courses in

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[1] Much of the early growth of the program can be attributed to the launching of Sputnik 1 in 1957. As a result of that event, the Ford Foundation funded a program to foster early college admission for gifted students. Secondary teachers felt threatened by this program, and welcomed Advanced Placement as an alternative that would allow their better students to do college level work without leaving the schools. Report of the Commission on Tests: 1. Righting the Balance (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970), p. 25.

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colleges and universities across the country, but it has served as an important catalyst for curricular change and experimentation within the secondary schools.

Following the lead of existing college "Western Civilization" courses, the AP European History course was organized chronologically, with the major emphasis on the period from the Renaissance to the Second World War. Through the years there have been relatively minor changes in the course description. More cultural and intellectual history has been brought into the outline, the emphasis has shifted to more recent history, and the chronological limits have been expanded to include the post-war period, but the structure has remained fundamentally unchanged.

In October, 1971, the Committee of Examiners met with curriculum consultants to re-evaluate the goals and methods of the AP European History program. Out of this conference emerged a plan to alter substantially the content and structure of the course to reflect the changes that the 1960's have brought to the curricula of both the colleges and the secondary schools. As a result of this meeting, several basic changes were made.

The emphasis has been shifted to the study of European civilization from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. For a number of years, the teachers have complained that there is simply not enough time in a one-year course to adequately cover the entire sweep of European history from the Middle Ages through the Second World War. There is also the matter of student interest, which has clearly shifted to the more modern period. After much and often heated debate, it was decided that if more time were to be allowed for in-depth study, it would be necessary to concentrate on the period from roughly the end of the Wars of Religion to the present.

Secondly, it was decided that greater stress would have to be placed on the relationship of European history to the other cultures of the world. For too long we have thought of European civilization in a narrow, isolated context, forgetting the important ties with, and the contributions that have been made to this culture by other areas of the world.

Thirdly, it was felt that the chronological format had outlived its usefulness and had become a hinderance rather than an aid to effective, innovative teaching. In an effort to free the teachers to develop courses that reflect their particular strengths and their students' interests, it was decided to organize the course along very broad thematic lines.[2]

For the first year, 1972-73, the Committee selected six general themes: 1) Political: Toward Egalitarian National States; 2) Intellectual: Changing Concepts of Man, God, and the Universe; 3) Social and Cultural: the Rise of a Mass Urban Society; 4) Economic: the Growth of an Industrial Technology; 5) International Relations: the Emergence of World Politics, and 6) Intercultural Responses: Europe and the Wider World. Possible topics that might be studied in relation to a specific theme are listed in the course description. As an example, under the third theme, Social and Cultural: the Rise of a Mass Urban Society, the following topics are suggested:

> The changing social structures from hereditary classes to egalitarian individualism
>
> The role of the city in the changing of cultural values and social patterns

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[2]At the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in December 1971, Professor Henry Bausum reported that a survey of 198 representative public and private colleges and universities across the country had revealed that over half of them had shifted from traditional chronologically organized introductory history courses to topical or thematic approaches.

Modes of social mobility and the responses of traditional societies to modernization

Conflicts of cultural and social values in emerging and developed mass societies

Competitive ideas and theories of the nature of man and societies

The interactions between elites and masses

The thematic approach will provide the teachers with a wide choice of teaching strategies, from the traditional chronological approach to topical inquiry and comparative studies. Using the themes as guidelines, individual students will be able to do projects and independent studies within the constraints of the course. The aim of the restructuring has been to provide a flexible and intellectually stimulating vehicle for juniors and seniors to study European history and be awarded advanced standing and college credit.

On the three-hour examination that will be administered next spring, students will be asked to choose any two essay questions from a field of ten, and write two sixty-minute essays. The essay questions are being designed so as to encourage a variety of approaches. The evaluation of the essays will stress the interpretive and analytical quality of each answer; its consistency and logical development; its mastery of supportive evidence and documentation; and its clarity of presentation. Students will be expected to have thoroughly studied at least two of the themes. A sixty-minute objective question section is being constructed to measure the students' grasp of the narrative sweep of history and its broad global context.

The Committee of Examiners envisions the course as constantly evolving with the passage of time. New themes will be added and others will be

retired. They are discussing further changes in the format of the examination that may include essay questions based on sets of real or fabricated documents that will be included in the test booklet. They are also investigating the possibility of providing procedures that allow for the evaluation of particular independent study projects.